Kerensky's Escape From the Bolsheviki

Rally of Forces After Downfall at Petrograd Last Flash in the Pan Against Bolsheviki

Thrilling Story of Premier's Ignominious Flight in Disguise When Courage and Hope Left Him

By LIEUT. BORIS SHUMANSKY.

PETROGRAD was in the hands of the Red Guards. Friends and partisans of Kerensky were in hiding or had fled to Gatchina. There, too, Kerensky had gone, determined to organize loyal forces to beat down the Bolsheviki. At that hour Kerensky still retained his confidence and determination. His spirit had not yet broken. There was fire and fight in the man.

When he escaped from the Winter Palace and Petrograd disguised as a sailor and travelling toward Gatchina in a slow train constantly searched by Red Guards with bayonets Kerensky reckoned on the fact that there was a military force of 5,000 men at Gatchina, where the authority of the Provisional Government was paramount. His last assurances to the members of his Cabinet when the storm was beginning to break and mobs of Bolsheviki were shrieking in the Nevski Prospect were that he could rally support at Gatchina and restore the authority of the true revolution.

Orders to Get Him Dead or Alive.

That he ever reached Gatchina alive or a free man was no less than miraculous. Lenine and Trotzky had known the exact hour of his departure from Petrograd and had set members of the Red Guards on his trail, with orders to capture him dead or alive. It was no secret that they would prefer to take him dead.

The train upon which he rode to Gatchina was boarded a dozen times by big, bearded, rough Bolshevik infantrymen, who routed all of the passengers out of their seats, made them stand up for search and prodded under seats with bayonets. However, Kerensky escaped all of these perils and reached Gatchina with hope yet remaining that it was not too late to correct the weaknesses of the situation: weaknesses, alas! due to his own singular softheartedness.

At Gatchina Kerensky called at once upon the commander of the southern front, Gen. Krasnow, and the chief of the Cossacks, Gen. Dukhonin. He ordered them to draw to his support an army from the front.

"I demand," he said, "an army to restore the authority of the people, but it must be an army that the front can spare without any positions being endangered."

Voitinsky Signs Gladly.

Gen. Krasnow informed Kerensky that he was prepared to obey the order, provided it was countersigned by the Soldiers' Committee at the front. Kerensky smiled at this, no doubt, because he recalled that the head of the Soldiers' Committee was Voitinsky, a devoted follower of his own. Naturally, Voitinsky gladly countersigned the order for troops which was drawn up by Premier Kerensky, and five regiments of infantry, with some pieces of artillery, were moved from the front to Gatchina.

Kerensky was tremendously elated by this turn in his fortune—a slight turn enough, heaven knows, although at the time it seemed a monumental development. But Kerensky was overjoyed. He was wild to communicate with his followers in Petrograd. He desired to restore their confidence. But as I have narrated the telephone and telegraph had been seized by the Bolsheviki after scenes of bloodshed and treachery.

People Like Cattle.

As I narrated in a preceding article the brutal Red Guards dominated the hundreds of thousands of people who knew not which way to turn once the fabric of government had broken down. Consider these people. They are not tigers nor lions nor wild beasts of any sort. They are more like domestic cattle; calm ordinarily, peaceful by habit, a little stupid it may be; certainly very ignorant.

In times of surprise, shock, excitement or sudden peril, when things happen which they do not understand, cattle may be driven wildly this way or that. They stampede. That is what was happening in Petrograd and generally in Russia. The Bolsheviki, cunning, unscrupulous, ambitious certainly, were utilizing these stampedes for their own ends.

Gen. Dukhonin (standing with hands clasped), killed by the Bolsheviki for supporting Kerensky.

Kerensky unquestionably did not realize how widely the trouble had spread; how completely the unthinking people had fallen under the sway of the Bolsheviki. There is no doubt that on the evening of October 26, 1917, when the five regiments and the batteries of artillery arrived at Gatchina from the front, the men singing and cheering for the Premier and making a very gallant and brave appearance, Kerensky believed his triumph was certain.

He carried himself with an air. He addressed the soldiers with the same ringing tones and the same inspirational gift for oratory that had made him famous in a day. He still believed in his star—rather, he still believed in the people. Let it be written here that Kerensky fell because he had overestimated the intelligence and the patriotism of his own people.

He did not set out to be a Bonaparte. He thought that the necessity for a dictator was hateful. He desired to lead rather than to rule. He was an idealist out and out. In these sentimentalisms and idealisms of Alexander Kerensky lay the causes of his downfall and the collapse of the Provisional Government.

It is too late to speculate, but the reflection cannot be avoided that no revolutionary government was ever in history guilty of more deplorable weakness than that which permitted any such organization as the Committee of Workmen's and Soldiers' Delegates ever to form. What Russia needed when the Romanoffs were driven off was a strong hand.

No telephone or telegraph messages could be sent to Petrograd to notify the Cabinet that help was coming, but Kerensky ordered airmen to fly over Petrograd and to drop messages of hope. The hour for marching against the capital was agreed upon, but difficulties began to raise their heads.

Gen. Dukhonin found the Cossacks suspicious and obstinate when he directed them to march to Petrograd against the Bolsheviki. The Cossacks made it very plain that they did not care a pinch of snuff for the Bolsheviki and that they would have been pleased to charge the Bolshevik mob, but they made it equally plain that they were through with Kerensky; that they would not fight for this man.

The reason was Korniloff, the brilliant soldier and devoted patriot, who thought to strike a powerful blow against the growing anarchy at the capital, but who was deserted by Kerensky at the very hour when a combination of their forces surely would have won. The Cossacks put the case plainer than this. They told Gen. Dukhonin that Kerensky had betrayed Korniloff and that they would never follow a traitor.

Dukhonin finally succeeded in inducing 2,000 Cossacks to agree to march to Petrograd, but the hetman said very grimly that they were marching to defend the revolution, not Kerensky. In those few gruff words was the epitaph, politically, of this man who might have been one of the first four or five of the earth's great, but who had collapsed because there was too much idealism and not enough common sense in his makeup.

The troops arrived at Gatchina on the evening of October 26, and Kerensky at once put himself at the head of this small army for the march against Petrograd. Within a few hours it was apparent that the Bolsheviki were well informed and well prepared. Kerensky's sentimental idea of dropping messages of hope upon the city had been of no use whatever to his own supporters but had been of the greatest advantage to his enemies. They had been warned of the attack which was to come. Kerensky might as well have sent them copies of his orders.

The Bolsheviki destroyed the railroad from Petrograd to Gatchina in order to prevent the swift movement of Kerensky's forces. On the highroads between Gatchina and Petrograd and in positions carefully selected they placed light and heavy artillery. An army of 40,000, some of whom were working men and women, fanatic followers of the Bolsheviki, dug trenches between Petrograd and Gatchina.

The next day, October 27, Kerensky's forces and the Bolshevik troops clashed not far from Gatchina. Temporarily the Bolsheviki were defeated, but Kerensky's forces were too small, it was then realized, to justify an advance against the capital.

There had been no such accessions as were expected by Kerensky when he fled to Gatchina. He fancied that thousands would draw about him to restore the revolution. No man ever suffered a bitterer disappointment.

A little later he came to see that Russia had passed him by, that Russia had lost confidence in his judgment and common sense. Few men desired to do him bodily harm, but they had come to have a sort of pity for him. He was an example so tremendous of the what might have been of politics, of revolution.

Chernoff Sent to the Front.

Chernoff, the social revolutionary leader, arrived at Gatchina immediately after this brief and indecisive conflict. Kerensky sent him to the front to appeal for reenforcements. Chernoff discovered that the soldiers in the trenches were hostile toward Kerensky.

They had no more belief in him. Some distrusted him for one reason, some for another. Scarcely any man could be found to praise him. Yet these were the same troops who had wept and sung and gone half delirious with enthusiasm only a few months before when Kerensky had flashed like a meteor among them.

Chernoff knew then and there that the fight was lost, that the situation was virtually hopeless. He returned to Gatchina and reported the truth to Kerensky, concealing nothing whatever.

Then Kerensky's spirit began to break. That day he did not speak to any man. That night he said to his aide-de-camp: "An army to crush the Bolsheviki, or suicide; that is the only way out."

On Perilous Mission.

Meantime in these anxious and troubled hours following the storming of the Winter Palace, the scenes of blood and disorder in the capital and Kerensky's ineffectual efforts to gain control of the situation, I had been waiting in Petrograd, observing developments. The social revolutionaries instructed me to go Gatchina to confer with Kerensky. It was a perilous mission obviously. Everywhere were guards of the Bolsheviki, and these guards scrutinized or searched every traveller. News had reached them that Kerensky was reassembling his forces near Gatchina for an attack on Petrograd, and they were on the qui vive.

I arrived in Gatchina at 8 o'clock on the evening of October 30, 1917. I learned that Kerensky was at the headquarters of the Fourteenth Army Corps in the Alexandra Palace. I presented my credentials to M. Voitinsky, the army commissary, and he told me confidentially that Kerensky's cause was hopeless; that from 65 to 70 per cent. of the army at the front was on the side of the Bolsheviki and that it was difficult to find one complete regiment loyal to the Provisional Government and willing to go to the rescue of Kerensky.

Surprised at Gloomy News.

At the time I heard these gloomy tidings with some astonishment, I could scarcely believe the situation to be so hopeless. It seemed to me that Kerensky so truly represented the fine ideals of the Russian people that it was impossible for the people to turn against him. I told Voitinsky that I was eager to see Kerensky at once.

"I have a message for him," I said. "All of the officers are with him. They are ready to take rifles and fight as privates in his army. Let him take command over us. We will disperse this disorganized force. We will shatter this brutal mob."

Voitinsky shook his head negatively, but made no answer in words. It was late at night. I went to the quarters assigned me. In the next room but one sat Kerensky himself, as I knew. I was so full of my mission that I could scarcely restrain myself from knocking at his door and compelling his attention. Voitinsky came to my room at 2 o'clock in the morning and informed me that Kerensky was very tired but would see me later in the morning.

At 9 A. M. my name was taken in to the

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